

serious scholarship, Lee's work would appeal to the academic community of political scientists and Asianists interested in political transitions in Asia.

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*Democracy in East Asia: A new century*

Edited by LARRY DIAMOND, MARC F. PLATTNER and YUN-HAN CHU

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In a seminal essay published in *Foreign Affairs* nearly twenty years ago, Fareed Zakaria (1997) posited the paradox of how democracy as embraced by much of the world was not the type prescribed by textbooks and Western liberal democracies. This state of affairs seems to echo the words of Thailand's latest coup leader, now prime minister, Prayuth Chan-o-cha who memorably dismissed allegations of torture of dissidents, 'Our country has seen so much trouble because we have had too much democracy.' Or has it?

The present edited volume, *Democracy in East Asia: A new century* exactly aims to plumb the state of democracy in East Asia. As a measure of how fast things change when it comes to politics, right after this book went to print, Thailand underwent yet another coup in May 2014. Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won the elections in Myanmar late 2015. Malaysia's 1MDB scandal was still roiling Kuala Lumpur in 2016. Whether democracy is held at abeyance or it has advanced on different fronts, the contentions that are raised by this stimulating collection of essays remain as relevant as ever.

This collection pivots on two main themes: China's influence on the rest of Asia, and the adoption of gradualism or creeping trade-offs in the implementation of democracy. None of the essays approaches the shrill alarmism of Gordon G. Chang's infamous 2001 thesis. Francis Fukuyama, for instance, believes China leads the rest of the East Asian nations in a skein of economic development based on authoritarian modernisation. Along the same vein, Benjamin Reilly proposes a geographical explanation for the salience of the China model. For example, countries which share a border with China (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam) are more authoritarian than maritime states like Indonesia.

But Fukuyama doubts the ability of such regimes in managing future challenges. China might inadvertently sow the seeds of its own 'social explosion'. Pei Minxin shares similar pessimism. Pei cites two factors for the longevity of the CCP in China: economic performance and political repression. He discounts the so-called institutional reforms in China. Herein lies the rub, just how far can the argument be made that the PRC has little institutional reform backing its economic performance?

Another variant of China's relations with its neighbours stands the conventional argument on its head. Chu Yun-han details the influence of Taiwan on mainland

China. Chu's central message, lessons to be gleaned from an authoritarian Taiwan evolving towards democracy, seems to be the *raison d'être* of this entire volume. On the leviathan's ability to evolve, Joseph Wong traces the connection between democratic reforms driven towards garnering votes and social welfare issues coming to the forefront of politics. Nonetheless, Wong also credits the economic well-being/prowess of Korea, Taiwan, and Japan for contributing to their ability to take up the mantle of social welfare.

If one should accept the central premise of this volume — democratic values and practices are essential for sustained development, the next question is — in exactly what forms will democracy manifest itself? Unfortunately, the answer is not straightforward. In fact, Chu and Hyug Baeg Im's joint account of the evolution of democracy in South Korea and Taiwan hold sobering lessons. All indicators point towards a gridlocked legislature. This counter-intuitive assaying of the merits of democratic forms is attested by Chong-Min Park and Yu-tzung Chang's findings. Voters from democratic countries registered a lower confidence in the very institutions that were supposed to uphold the rule of law. By far the most interesting aspect for this reviewer is the outcome of the survey for 'competitive authoritarianism'. For instance, Singapore has the distinction of having 83 and 69 per cent for public trust in the Parliament and political parties, respectively. The paradox is obvious, the more free and liberal the country in its political processes, the less trust is registered.

Democracy is not an immediate panacea. Adroit negotiations between the power of the state and democratic practices seem to be the rule. Edward Aspinnall clearly spells out how Indonesia's brand of democracy has the unique ability to absorb potential 'spoilers' into the system. Predatory practices in the provinces seemingly increased. Elsewhere in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, as recounted by Martin Gainsborough, liberal democracy seemed to have given way to rapacious money politics. Echoing Bismarck's adage that 'politics is the art of the possible', the NLD also found it expedient to work with Burmese military reformers. Min Zin and Brian Joseph find that Aung San Suu Kyi very much preferred cooperation and gradualism to nurture the momentum created in the first place by the reformers themselves.

It used to be Marxists who would espouse revolutionary overthrow of the existing order — as when Lenin noted that the oppressed masses showed a tendency to 'cast off this yoke and to overthrow the bourgeoisie' a century ago. Curiously, Larry Diamond, who is one of the editors, stridently states, 'It is not unreasonable to predict that, within a generation or so, most of East Asia will turn democratic, with profound consequences for democratic prospects globally.' Now this book and its preceding conference were funded by ROC Ministry of the Interior, ostensibly for the one hundredth anniversary of Xinhai Gemin. One may rightly wonder if there will be a day when the PRC Ministry of State Security will vouchsafe the third edition of *Democracy in East Asia*.

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